

Tempe Budget Community Forum

Feb. 16, 2010, at 6 p.m.

City Council Chambers

The following is a recap of questions asked and answers given during the first of four community forums held in February 2010 regarding the 2010-11 city budget balancing effort. Answers were provided by City Manager Charlie Meyer unless otherwise noted. To view video of the entire forum and hear the Q&A verbatim, visit www.tempe.gov/budgetplan, click on the “Current Budget Process” tab and scroll down to the link under the Feb. 16 community forum.

Q1: Has the city looked into job sharing? Have employees felt that was a viable thing to do?

A: We have a job sharing program in effect now. It’s not always easy to find people for whom this works schedule-wise. There may be other opportunities that wouldn’t take this level of coordination.

Q2: Are pay cuts going to be pro-rated based on salary level?

A: A Councilmember asked us to look at a progressive salary rate change. We also are looking at furloughs. Most employees work under an MOU so that’s difficult to do. The Council has directed us to propose a plan that amounts to \$5 million in pay and benefits.

Q3: Crime in my neighborhood has improved. How can we make sure that it is still safe if the Police Department is cut?

A: Staff has made reduction recommendations and prioritized them. The listings of reductions are number 1 to 212. In the system we set up for the City Council if there are revenue items or additional cuts that money would be used to restore eliminations from the bottom up. The most severe public safety cuts appear after No. 200 on the list. The first money that gets put back in is reflected to the Police Department and the services that we most rely on which are those officers who respond to calls. Police cuts are also in other levels of the plan – those without question also have impacts on service. One example is that we participate in a regional gang task force. On the table is an idea to ramp down our gang unit and rely more on regional partnerships and feed that information to our patrol staff. Is that as good as what we’re doing right now: no. But do we think that it’s a reasonable approach to policing: we think it is. We are trying to make use of partnerships wherever they exist. The crime prevention team is eliminated but patrol officers can absorb some of this function. We want to try to hang onto those who respond to calls.

Q4: Why would reducing the gang team be ahead of landscape maintenance in the priorities? Can you explain?

A: If you talk to Police professionals they will tell you about CPTED criteria and that the look of a community affects crime rates. It’s a fairly sophisticated science. When you see signs of deterioration in neighborhoods there is an argument that it signals that crime is

acceptable in that area. We made significant cuts to landscape maintenance in 2009-10 and for 2010-11. I'm worried we may be cutting too deeply in these areas.

Q5: Tempe over the last 15 years has been going to xeriscape in medians. Near McClintock and Baseline within eight months, the city has added landscaping including many trees. It looked fine before. Decisions are being made in a budget crisis that don't make sense.

A: (Parks and Recreation Manager Mark Richwine) There are two sources of funding for this work. Maintenance activities are funded by the General Fund and currently we take care of areas on two rotating schedules – some are maintained every two weeks and others maintained once a month. According to what has been proposed for 2010-11, that would move to once a month and quarterly. When it comes to projects like medians, those renovations are funded by Capital Improvement Program (CIP) funds, which are paid through secondary property taxes.

Q6: I have observed that where there's blight there's crime. In the past when I report something, a code enforcement person had to come out first. Is there a way since Code Enforcement staff are being reduced that you could take a resident's word for it when they report a problem? I am also worried about responsiveness with graffiti.

A: (Development Services Manager Chris Anaradian) We are trying to find creative ways to keep the community attractive in spite of the budget situation. We are trying to educate people about citations and give them the due process they're entitled to. We try to work with people to get compliance before issuing citations. One of the things we're doing is looking at technological ways to enable our staff to be more productive in the field and not have to come back to the office to file reports. If we have spikes in enforcement activity that is required or a weekend sweep in a neighborhood, we propose using another 15-18 city staff members who are familiar with the city's codes and standards to assist with these efforts.

Q7: There is another proposal by the Tempe Officers Association (TOA) for reductions in the Police Department that do not include eliminating 96 officer positions. Why are you not considering that?

A: Department heads brought cuts forward based on specific dollar amount targets and I mixed them all together to come up with the overall priorities. By and large, the priority order I put them in is the same order the departments put them in. I did remove some suggestions for not being feasible for various reasons, but I didn't add items to the list. Revenue enhancement ideas from the results teams are part of the short term opportunities list in the budget balancing proposal. The TOA President shared ideas with me and I told him he should sit down with Police Chief Tom Ryff to discuss them. That happened probably later than I would prefer but it did occur. The Police Chief did substitute some things in his plan. I was not going to substitute my decision making for that of the department managers who are vested with the responsibility of leading these departments. That set of ideas from the TOA was the most structured and comprehensive of the employee suggestions we have received.

Q8: I am concerned about public safety and being able to call for help when needed. Are creative staffing ideas included in the plan?

A: (Police Chief Tom Ryff) I do not support any cuts to sworn officers because I can't tell you we will maintain the same level of service we have today. We have been trying to increase the safety of the community and, when I became Police Chief, formulated a comprehensive proposal to deal with crime now and in the future. Tempe has some very unique challenges. The fact that I put these cuts forward does not mean I endorse them. We recognize that we must contribute for the benefit of the community as a whole. I have laid out the impact indicators of all the cuts I put forward. This is not just about sworn officers; it is also about park rangers, communications personnel, evidence technicians and other employees. Tempe is a very vibrant community and we have come to expect much from our Police service. Cuts of this magnitude, if they were taken as is, would have a significant impact on public safety. When you have an economic recession you tend to see an increase in crime; we have started to see an increase in some types of crimes. We have many partnerships in place that augment our existing staff.

(City Manager Charlie Meyer) There is good reason to be proud of programs like school resource officers, which are extremely beneficial for prevention. The 212 cuts citywide do not mean we want to do any of these.

(Fire Chief Cliff Jones) The financial problem is real and the Fire Department understands. Someone has the responsibility to talk about the impacts to the Fire Department's service levels. Two major potential cuts have been proposed for the Fire Department. A fire company is in Level 3 of the plan and another fire company is in Level 5. Together, these companies equal 20 percent of our force. Our Fire Department is very effective because of the resource sharing provided by the automatic aid system regionally. We provide excellent service for minimal costs. The insurance organization that evaluates our city indicates Tempe would need 10 stations if we did not have the automatic aid system. It's unique in the nation to have automatic aid. We have six fire stations in Tempe and we're trying to get to seven. The City Council funded the staffing for that seventh station over a year ago and that has improved our response time citywide in the last year. We are highly dependent on Mesa, Chandler and Guadalupe to help us. As cities delete resources from the automatic aid system, it affects the entire region. I see a 10-20 percent cut to Fire and medical services as the challenge of my 38-year career. I hope that we can find alternatives.

Q9: I do my best to shop locally in Tempe and I'm willing to pay more in sales tax to do that. I would like to know that employee groups will come to the table for the good of the whole community. Tempe is a very balanced community. We need Police and Fire service, and we need Kid Zone and the library.

A: Balance is what this forum is all about. Council is considering that balance now. That is best achieved when people speak out on all aspects of the proposal. The City Council agreed 1 ½ years ago to freeze wages for three years and our employee groups agreed. Council has said we may need to do more and directed me to work with the employee groups. They set a goal of \$5 million in pay and benefits savings, but did not direct a specific solution. There are options outside of the employee groups' MOUs like

furloughs. The word is out to our employee groups that they can make alternative offers. It's not too late in the process for that. The feedback I get from our employee groups is not negative; we are all in this together.

Q10: What does the “additional deficit” in the plan mean, from \$31 million to \$33.7 million?

A: The City Council discussed the size of the deficit. There was agreement that the basic number is \$30 million. The state is also experiencing budget problems and that could impact us. We already figured less money from state-shared revenues but we could lose other funding sources. We also wanted to be conservative about the timing and level of economic recovery that may be on the horizon.

Q11: Did the City Council give up their car allowance?

A: The City Council discussed eliminating car allowances, which apply to department heads and Council. That reduction would apply to everyone.

Q12: Could the taxes be used for anything or would they be restricted?

A: The bed tax would have to be used for something related to tourism. The sales tax that is on the ballot would have no restrictions. It is available to be used for any purpose. The City Council has said its priority is to restore from the bottom up.

Q13: How much will our statements tonight impact the process.

A: The City Council is very interested in seeing the input from these forums.

Q14: Tempe is in a crisis situation. Why are we maintaining peripheral services like the pool at Kiwanis Recreation Center in the face of public safety cuts. Certain things should take priority.

A: A \$30 million deficit is a critical situation. Achieving balance is what this process is all about. People need to speak out on behalf of services they value. The deepest cuts in the proposal are first to Community Development and Development Services, followed by Community Services and Parks & Recreation. After these were considered, public safety was considered, which has grown in the last 10 years.

Q15: How do you justify cuts in staff this deep in the Police Department if crime is on the way up. There are executive level positions, particularly in the office of the Chief – why aren't those cut before line-level positions?

A: (Police Chief Tom Ryff) All civilian and sworn officers are important to making the department work. In my office, priority is placed on people who can interact with the community and Council on issues. We need that direct feedback about what is happening in the community. The Executive Officer of the Chief was a position that served as that kind of conduit but that position was eliminated as part of this plan. Management is an important component of police work; they are responsible for identifying crime trends, managing training and liability issues, and being first responders on the scenes of major incidents. Through the cuts proposed in this plan, we are reducing from three assistant

chiefs to two. Since July 2007 we created the following positions, most of which are being eliminated in the 2010-11 budget proposal:

- 11 civilians – all eliminated
- 14 officers – all eliminated
- three new sergeants – all eliminated
- two civilian supervisors – both eliminated
- nine lieutenants – four of the nine are being eliminated
- three civilian middle managers – all eliminated
- one commander – eliminated
- one assistant chief – eliminated

Of the 44 positions created, four will remain if the proposed cuts are accepted.

Q16: I appreciate the support of the part-time disability/accessibility position the city employs. Where does parking enforcement fall in this as far as accessible parking spaces and enforcement in general. Tonight I had to look a while to find a handicapped accessible spot. Accessibility to retail stores is almost impossible in some places. Code enforcement sends people out but they are being reduced in this plan. There are 50,000 disabled people in Tempe.

A: (Charlie Meyer) We are making cuts to parking enforcement staff but are working on an arrangement with the Downtown Tempe Community (DTC) to do meter enforcement. There are good reasons to use them for this purpose, in order to preserve Police for more serious violations like handicapped parking and fire lanes. Bike patrols and regular patrols can look at these violations.

(Tom Ryff) There are arrangements to use volunteers to assist Police moving forward and are already training volunteers for this. It may not be the same level of service as today. It's a new concept for our department – we have never had volunteers working for parking enforcement – but there's another example of it being done in the Valley.

(Charlie Meyer) Regarding code enforcement, we are integrating the commercial and residential code enforcement teams. While we are cutting back, the intent is still to provide service. We view it as a priority to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Q17: I am concerned about the reduction in library hours from 70 to 56. People want to look for work and can't afford Internet access. Resources like the library and Parks and Recreation programs are vital to our children because they provide an alternative place to go when school is not in session.

A: Access to computers at the library will improve once the renovation process is done later this summer, so overall the access should improve even if the hours decrease. The proposed cut in hours is a reflection of the loss of staff. Specifically research and children's library staff will be impacted. The good news is that the library will be better in some ways after the renovation but we won't be able to provide as much service. We have not yet selected how the 56 hours would be allocated during the week.

Q18: What is the impact on response times from the Police and Fire cuts?

A: (Charlie Meyer) The first fire company identified in Level 3 of the plan was put in place to staff the seventh fire station. Those people would not be laid off but would be used to replace overtime when fire companies are short staffed. The second fire company in Level 5 is more severe and would result in the elimination of firefighter positions.

(Cliff Jones) The Fire Department has a goal for high-priority calls to be responded to within five minutes and 30 seconds on 90 percent of occasions. Our actual response time average is 5 minutes and 40 seconds on 74 percent of occasions, so we are far short of our long-term response goal. We expect that will improve once we are able to get the seventh fire station and have that company located there. The addition of the extra company for the future seventh fire station had a positive impact on our response times last year.

(Tom Ryff) The Police Department's goal is three minutes and 30 seconds to what we call "Priority Zero" calls. We are concerned about response times. We need to shift resources from special assignments to basic patrol to keep reaching this goal.

Q19: What other sources of money are you looking at to prevent position eliminations?

A: There are areas where we are pushing the envelope like tacking fees on to citations and court fines. The charges sometimes exceed the penalties. We need to balance these things. We are looking at other fees such as accident fees to recover what we expend on responding to accidents; the insurance company of the at-fault driver would be assessed the fee. There are the two tax proposals on the ballots. There also are increases to things like Kid Zone and other fees. The Arizona tax system and its reliance on sales tax unfortunately limits us. About 70 percent of our income is from local or state sales tax. We are trying to mine every feasible area for revenue.

Q20: The city prided itself on having a surplus. Why not use that to preserve services?

A: We have spent \$52 million of a \$70 million reserve in the last two years. None of us predicted the recession would last this long. It would be imprudent to take our reserves lower than the current level and it also would not be good to use it for ongoing operating costs.